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SUBJECT: VAN ECK SAYS FNL-SAG TIES IMPROVED, PROGRESS
POSSIBLE IN PEACE TALKS WITH GOB

REF: A. PRETORIA 428

[1](#)B. PRETORIA 250

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Don Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Relations between the South African Facilitation and the Burundi rebel movement the Palipehutu-FNL are improved, albeit fragile, according to South African-based Burundi analyst and informal FNL advisor Jan van Eck. Although the FNL is the only rebel group outside the peace process, it believes time is on its side, as the lack of peace only undermines support for the CNDD-FDD-led government. Van Eck argues that the alleged FNL dissidents in camps in Burundi are not actually FNL, and that Agathon Rwasa retains the support of the combatants in the field. Per van Eck, for the FNL leadership to return to Burundi, the Facilitation and GOB must address the core FNL demands on security, immunity, and food for combatants. To conclude the peace process, the FNL needs to feel that its positions are taken seriously, including on key issues such as creating jobs for them in government and allowing the party to retain its name. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) DAS Swan and PolOff met independent analyst Jan van Eck in Cape Town February 23, on the margins of the DFA-sponsored seminar in Burundi (ref A). Van Eck, a former South African Member of Parliament and long-time Burundi watcher, remains in close contact with the senior leadership of the Palipehutu-FNL (FNL). Many in the international community, including in the South African Government (SAG), regard van Eck as biased toward the FNL, a charge he denies.

FNL and Facilitation Ties "Restored"

[1](#)3. (SBU) Van Eck, who traveled to Dar es Salaam in mid-February to meet with the FNL leadership, said that the relationship between the FNL and the South African Facilitation had been "restored" following the complete rupture in late 2007, although the link remained "fragile." The FNL remains committed to the documents it signed, including the September 2006 Ceasefire Agreement, but argues the "implementation" of these agreements requires further discussion.

FNL In No Rush

¶4. (C) According to van Eck, the FNL believes that the longer the crisis drags on, the more they benefit. They surmise that the prolonged instability undermines the CNDD-FDD-led government's ability to deliver on economic development and improved services. The support for the CNDD-FDD has already dropped to 40 percent, and will continue to decline, which will only benefit the FNL in the next elections. DAS Swan noted that there is a danger that the FNL will itself lose support - or even be completely frozen out of the upcoming elections - unless it joins the peace process.

Alleged Dissidents Not FNL

¶5. (SBU) Asked about the alleged FNL dissidents who are in camps in Burundi, van Eck argued that very few were actually FNL. He suggested that the groups have "no leader" and "no platform," unlike previous FNL break-away groups. The "moderates" who want to join the peace process remain in the field and are led by Agathon Rwasa, who has been criticized by militants for signing the Ceasefire Agreement.

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What FNL Needs to Return to Burundi

¶6. (SBU) On the practical elements that would be required for the FNL leadership to return to Bujumbura, van Eck outlined three key issues:

-- Security of their participants in the JVMM: Van Eck believes this is easily solved and requires little more than clarification of issues. Ambassador Bah, the AU Representative, should lead those discussions.

-- Immunity: The FNL does not believe that its leaders have legal immunity since the immunity law did not specify the party by name. They question whether the Presidential statement, which clarified their status, is binding.

-- Food: The FNL must feed its combatants who remain in the field. The leadership cannot move to Bujumbura and eat well, while the combatants struggle, van Eck argued. Van Eck suggested that the GOB should provide the FNL combatants with food as a gesture of goodwill. Although ready to accept food from the GOB, the FNL combatants are not yet prepared to canton in assembly points and disarm; there is not yet enough trust for that.

¶7. (SBU) More broadly, van Eck argued that the FNL must feel that its policy positions are taken seriously. The FNL has suffered through 28 years of neglect and abuse. It trusts no one. The FNL is not loyal to a constitution it had no role in negotiating. In van Eck's opinion, the GOB must be open to constitutional changes on issues such as governmental positions for the FNL and the name of the party. "Compromises are possible," van Eck said, but there must be a "positive environment of trust." The FNL must have something "concrete" to show their supporters.

Rwasa and Nkurunziza Relationship; FNL Dynamics

¶9. (SBU) Asked why the June 2007 face-to-face meeting between Rwasa and President Nkurunziza did not produce more positive results, van Eck said that expectations were too high. In addition, there was no follow-up, and limited goodwill. As far as van Eck knows, the two have not spoken since the meeting. "You can take horses to water," van Eck observed, "but can't make them drink."

¶10. (SBU) Concluding, van Eck said that Rwasas remains firmly in control of the FNL. He said that Rwasas is the "intellectual, substantive" leader, while spokesman Pasteur Habimana is more "emotional and propagandistic." Rwasas is the leader, but decision-making is collective. Rwasas constantly worries about the FNL delegates in Dar es Salaam losing touch with the grassroots, and returns to the field from time to time to "refresh" his mandate.

Comment

¶11. (C) As with the FNL, South African Government officials have had a rocky relationship with van Eck, reportedly one of the FNL's closest outside advisors. SAG Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Mamabolo has told us in the past that he regards van Eck as an impediment to peace (ref B), alleging that van Eck pushes the FNL into hardline positions. That said, in recent weeks, as the SAG developed its new FNL peace plan (ref A), Mamabolo has reached out to van Eck to seek his advice on bringing the FNL into the peace process. On the sidelines of the Burundi seminar in Cape Town, Mamabolo met van Eck several times, and van Eck tells us they talk almost daily. This increased dialogue between Mamabolo and van Eck (and indirectly between the FNL and SAG) can only aid the prospects for peace -- although the real test will come in the weeks ahead when the FNL is asked to make concrete compromises on returning to Bujumbura and implementing the Ceasefire Agreement.
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